Miniſters of the Goſpel, Gifts of the LORD to his Churches; and to be obtained by Prayer.

A

SERMON

PREACHED

AT

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A FAST, ſanctified by the Congregational-Church and Society there, under Bereavement of their Paſtor.

(Publiſhed at the Deſire of many of ſaid Society.)

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Paſtor of the Weſt Church in *Rowley*.

I will give you Paſtors according to mine Heart, which ſhall feed you with Knowledge and with Underſtanding.
JER. 3. 15.

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the Harveſt, that he will ſend forth Laborers into his Harveſt. MAT. 9. 38.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

Miniſters of the Goſpel Gifts of the LORD to his Churches, &c.

Epiſtle to PHILEMON 22 ver.

—I truſt that through your Prayers I ſhall be given unto you.

SAINT *Paul*, who wrote theſe words to *Philemon, and to the church which was in his houſe*, was a miniſter—an apoſtle of Jeſus Chriſt, who if he were *given to them*, would have *come to them, in the fullneſs of the bleſſing of the goſpel of Chriſt.* This being attended to, the word of God which I have now read to you leads us to obſerve,

That miniſters of the goſpel are gifts which the LORD gives to his churches. And—That his people are to wait on him in all the ways which he preſcribes to them, particularly, by prayer for theſe gifts.

Let it be obſerved, *in the firſt place*, that *miniſters of the goſpel are gifts of the LORD to his church*—to particular churches.

This

This obſervation will be illuſtrated, if we conſider—the miniſtry of the word to be of divine inſtitution—that ſuch a miniſtry is a rich gift to the churches, and then, view the gift itſelf, take notice of the character of a good miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt.

That *a goſpel-miniſtry is of divine inſtitution, is firſtly* to be obſerved.

In all ages of the church, God has ſent his ſervants to his people, to ſpeak his words—to be his embaſſadors to them. Under the old-teſtament, he appointed *Moſes* and the *Prophets* to be maſter-builders, to *lay* the foundation; and for ordinary miniſters, *Prieſts, whoſe lips were to keep knowledge, and the people were to ſeek the law at their mouths, they being the meſſengers of the Lord of Hoſts*[a].

And that the goſpel-day might come, *the ſun of righteouſneſs aroſe* unto the church. God *raiſed up* his ſon Jeſus, *a prophet like unto Moſes*, and greater than Moſes. *whom we ſhould hear in all things, whatſoever he ſaith unto us.*[b] *The great ſalvation began to be ſpoken by the Lord*[c]. And when he had finiſhed his perſonal miniſtry on this earth, he commiſſioned his diſciples to be his apoſtles, to *go into all the world, and preach the goſpel to every creature*[d]: He made them extraordinary miniſters in his church: ſuch as the then ſtate of the church required. By the miniſtry of the apoſtles and evangeliſts, we have the goſpel—the new-teſtament, that ſure word of our ſalvation.

And the Lord thought fit that there ſhould be a miniſtry in his church, to the end of the world:

That

That *elders ſhould be ordained in every church*[e]. *When he aſcended up on high, he gave gifts unto men: gave ſome, apoſtles: and ſome, prophets: and ſome, evangeliſts: and ſome, paſtors and teachers; for the perfecting of the ſaints, for the work of the miniſtry, for the edifying of the body of Chriſt*[f]. There is, moreover, the word of the Lord to his miniſters, directing and encouraging them in their work: And his word to his people, bidding them to *know them who are over them in the Lord, and admoniſh them; and to eſteem them very highly in love for their work's ſake*[g]. Thus, it is evident that a goſpel miniſtry is an inſtitution of the Lord.

2. This miniſtry is *a free and rich gift* of God to his church.

Miniſters of the goſpel are the Lord's ambaſſadors, bound, by all bonds, to be faithful to his cauſe and kingdom, to perſuade men to give unto God, the things which are God's. At the ſame time, they are the Lord's meſſengers of peace and ſalvation to men: The Lord ſends them [h] *to ſhew unto their brethren the way of ſalvation.* 'Tis of his love and grace that he does this: Such a miniſtry is a rich gift of his to his churches. This may appear in a clear light, if we conſider—The need Chriſt's ſheep are in of a goſpel-miniſtry—and what the end and deſign of this gift is, what is, through divine grace, the fruit of a good miniſtry. Obſerve then,

1. The *need* Chriſt's ſheep have of a goſpel miniſtry. When he came into this world, he ſaid—He was *come to ſeek and to ſave that which is*

[e] Tit. 1. 5. [f] Eph. 4 Ch. [g] Theſ. 5. 12, 13. [h] Acts 16. 17.

is loſt[i]. In theſe words he gives a deſcription of fallen man. We are *loſt:* are *ſinners without ſtrength:* Not only lay under a great load of guilt, which we have no righteouſneſs of our own to remove; but our minds are blind, and all the faculties of our ſouls viciated: We are even *dead in treſpaſſes and ſins*[k]. Wherefore, though God has provided a way of ſalvation for ſinners of mankind, yet the door of this ſalvation muſt be opened to them, by the preaching of the goſpel. For, (as the apoſtle Paul argues, *Rom.* 10. 14.) *How ſhall they call on him, in whom they have not believed? and how ſhall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard? and how ſhall they hear without a preacher?* We may ſee the force of this arguing, by viewing the heathens, who never heard of a Saviour—are without Chriſt in the world; and are worſhippers of dumb idols, *are taken captive by the devil at his will.* And what if the word of God had never been miniſtred to us, by Moſes and the prophets, by Chriſt and his apoſtles?—We alſo had then been *without God, and without Chriſt in the world*, and conſequently, *without hope.* And in a land of light, where we have bibles, how much do we need a good miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt, to preach the goſpel to us? There are, without doubt, in all our congregations, unregenerate ſinners,—ſinners that muſt *repent or periſh*[l] —muſt be *born again*, or they *cannot ſee the kingdom of God*[m]: Some of them are hardened, ſecure ſinners: Some are pure in their own eyes, though they

[i] Luke 19. 10. [k] Eph. 2. begin. [l] Luke 13. Ch.
[m] Joh. 3. 3. & 5.

they are not washed from their filthiness: And some of them, it may be, are despairing, and murmuring, as if there was no door of salvation open to them. These are all of them in danger of missing the narrow way to life, even though they should be awaked to some concern about their own salvation; especially in this day, when there is so much false religion.

These sinners want a good gospel ministry: and such a ministry is instituted for their conversion and salvation.

And real christians have a warfare—a race to run, in which they will have need of the best means to help them. They slumber, wander from the Lord; are buffetted, tempted, and sometimes are weak and ready to faint: They know not what to do, and want the ministry of the word to wake them, to reduce, to guide, to sanctify, and to comfort them.

However light any make of the gospel ministry, when they are in health and prosperity, yet, in a trying hour, particularly in their spiritual troubles, men will feel their need of a good minister of Jesus Christ, to *comfort them with the consolations of God.*

The consideration of our need of the ministry of the word, leads us to acknowledge such a ministry to be a rich gift of God. One way of estimating a gift, is by the need we stand in of it—the piteous case we must have remained in, if the gift had not been given to us. And this consideration leads us to observe further, that we are unworthy of a gospel-ministry: Tis sin that makes it so much needed; and that sin deserves

God's wrath. When therefore our piteous caſe is the caſe of guilty ſinners, it is free grace in God to ſend to us ambaſſadors with words of peace and reconciliation: Herein it appears that God's *thoughts and ways are above ours, as heaven is higher than the earth.*

That we may the more clearly diſcern the richneſs of God's gift of a goſpel-miniſtry, we may obſerve,

2. *The end* of this miniſtry; and what *the fruit and effect* of a good miniſtry is, through God's grace.

We are told for what end miniſters are ſent to preach the word to ſinners; even, *to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkneſs to light, and from the power of ſatan unto God, that they may receive forgiveneſs of ſins, and inheritance among them which are ſanctified by faith which is in Jeſus Chriſt.* Acts 26. 18.

And to real chriſtians miniſters are ſent to be *helpers of their joy*[n]. The Lord bids them *feed his ſheep and his lambs*[o]—feed them *with knowledge and underſtanding—give to every one his portion* of the word, *in due ſeaſon*[p]. He bids them *preach the word*—that word of God, by which, *of his own will, he begets his elect*[q]. In ſhort, they are appointed to be *workers together with God*[r], inſtruments in the converſion of ſinners, and the edification of the ſaints.

Is it not a rich gift of God to his churches, to ſend his miniſters to them for this end?

And that this is the *deſign* of the goſpel-miniſtry, obſerve the *fruit* and *effect* of it.

Though

[n] 2 Cor. 1. 24. [o] John 21 Chap. [p] Luke 12. 42. &c.

Though miniſters have no ſelf-ſufficiency to convert men, and to build them up in faith, yet when they *plant and water*, God, of his grace *giveth the increaſe*: He is wont to bleſs his word which they preach—to make it effectual to the elect for their ſalvation.

It muſt be granted, that good miniſters of Jeſus Chriſt have not that ſucceſs—that meaſure of ſucceſs which is to be deſired: It is to be lamented, that there are hypocrites, many hardened ſinners, under a good miniſtry. But to others they are *the ſavor of life unto life*[a], inſtruments of their converſion and ſalvation; the ſpirit of God making the preaching of the word thus effectual. There is a foundation for this concluſion—that faithful miniſters of the goſpel are inſtrumental in winning ſouls to Chriſt, and in the edification of ſaints: Under ſuch a miniſtry ſons and daughters are born to God, and *the firſt-born of the poor feed*, churches walk in the faith and order of the goſpel. Whereas, were it not for the miniſtry of the goſpel, it is likely that even the form of religion would ſoon be loſt.—Thus chriſtians are led to prize the miniſtry of the word as a rich gift of their aſcended Lord.

We may ſee this point further illuſtrated when,

3. In the third place we *take a view of this gift* of the Lord to his church—*attend to the character* of a miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt.

The churches muſt do this, both that they may know whom to regard as meſſengers of the Lord to them, and that they may duly eſteem this gift of their Lord. This treaſure is *in earthen veſſels*:

[a] 2 Cor. 2. 16.

Miniſters of the goſpel are men—*men of like paſſions* with their brethren. Yet they are men whomGod qualifies for the office, in ſuch a meaſure, that their miniſtry tends to anſwer the end for which they are given.—We may ſee ſomething of their character in the particulars that now follow.

1. A miniſter of the goſpel is *viſibly, a true diſciple of Chriſt.*

What king will truſt *that* man as *his* ambaſſador to negociate his moſt weighty matters, *whom* he knows to be his enemy, not cordial to his intereſt?—But what ſaith the ſcripture in this caſe?—Our Lord aſked Peter ſaying—*Simon ſon of Jonas loveſt thou me more than theſe?* And upon his anſwering in the affirmative, he ſaid to him—*feed my ſheep—feed my lambs*[t]. And the apoſtle Paul wrote that *a biſhop ſhould be blameleſs—a lover of good men, ſober, juſt, holy, temperate*[u], that he ſhould be *an example to the believers, in word, in converſation, in charity, in ſpirit, in faith, in purity*[w]. Here ſeems to be the character or deſcription of a man who *loves the Lord JeſusChriſt in ſincerity.* I may add, that doing the work of the miniſtry, requires the exerciſe of grace. A miniſter of the goſpel ſhould therefore be a man enriched with the grace of God.—But how ſhall the churches know that a man is a ſaint?—Not by any of thoſe marks which enthuſiaſm has invented; and which have ſometimes been in vogue with ſome people. But by a profeſſion of chriſtianity—a profeſſion of faith and repentance; and by a life and converſation agreeing with this profeſſion,

[t] John 21. 15, 16, 17. [u] Tit. 1. 8. [w] 1 Tim. 4. 12.

ſeſſion, and which gives credit to it. By *their fruits ye ſhall know them*[x].

2. A miniſter of the goſpel muſt have *gifts* qualifying him to be a teacher of others.

A man's being a ſound believer don't make him a miniſter: That alone don't make him fit to be a miniſter of the word. No. The apoſtle Paul has twice[y] written, that a miniſter of the goſpel muſt be *apt to teach*. The work of the miniſtry is ſuch as makes this neceſſary, though a miniſter who is in the lower claſs as to gifts, may by diligence and fidelity in his work be uſeful.

It is very deſirable that a miniſter be a man of a learned education. There is need of this on ſeveral accounts. And they who ſpeak againſt it, may, almoſt as well, ſpeak againſt reaſon itſelf; for learning ſerves to open the underſtanding—to enlarge the mind: And they who decry learning as not needful, not uſeful, for a miniſter of the goſpel, have ſome deſign therein, not agreeing with truth and holineſs.—But it is not enough that a miniſter be a man of ingenuity and learning. It is too evident, that ſome ſuch men have erred from the truth, and employed their ſuperior talents to pervert the goſpel; yea, even againſt revelation itſelf. Therefore,

3. A miniſter of the goſpel muſt be *ſound in the faith*—muſt know and preach *the truth as it is in Jeſus*.

'Tis *by ſound doctrine* that he muſt be *able both to convince and exhort gainſayers*[z]: He muſt *preach the word*—the word of God—*that incorruptible*

[x] Matt. 7. 16. [y] 1 Tim. 3. 2. 2 Tim. 2. 24. [z] Tit. 1. 9.

ruptible ſeed which liveth, and abideth for ever; and not the chaff of his own inventions.—But we may not hence conclude, that every good miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt is exactly of the ſame opinion, and that they all ſpeak the ſame things in leſſer matters. No. Such miniſters don't pretend to infallibility—to perfection in knowledge.

Their buſineſs is, *to build upon the foundation* which Chriſt and his apoſtles have laid, to preach the written word: And they humbly confeſs that *they know but in part, and propheſy but in part*; and they wait on the Lord for more perfect knowledge of the truth.

Yet there are *foundation-truths* of the goſpel, in which, it may be expected that, all goſpel-miniſters will agree: Such as (to inſtance in two or three) *the fallen ſtate of mankind*: Not only that we are all gone out of the way by actual tranſgreſſions of God's law, but that, as fallen in Adam[a], we are *natively dead in treſpaſſes and ſins*, ſo that we muſt *be born again, or we cannot ſee the kingdom of God*; born from above, for *the ſons of God are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the fleſh, nor of the will of man, but of God*[b]:—That being thus ſinners, we are guilty before God, under his wrath and curſe; and *that we cannot be juſtified in his ſight by the deeds of the law*—for our own worthineſs or works[c].—That tho' we are thus ſelf-deſtroyed, yet *our help is in the Lord*: God has given his ſon Jeſus Chriſt to be the redeemer of loſt ſinners. We muſt all *preach Chriſt, the way, the truth and the life; the only name under heaven, given among men, whereby we*

[a] Rom. 5. 12 Ch. [b] John 1. 13. [c] Rom. 3d Chap.

we muſt be ſaved[d]—Preach Chriſt in his perſon, offices and benefits. It may be expected of all goſpel-miniſters, that they will preach *faith in Chriſt*, as that by which a man is ſo united to him, as to partake of his righteouſneſs unto juſtification, and of his ſpirit to ſanctification by them: That they preach *repentance and remiſſion of ſins in the name of Chriſt*: That they preach *the neceſſity of the effectual influences of the divine ſpirit* on the hearts of ſinners, to begin, to carry on, and to perfect a work of grace in them; and *the encouragement* that is given them in the goſpel, to cry to God for this work of his power and grace in them. *Theſe* are ſome of the things included in *ſound doctrine*. In ſhort, all the miniſters of the goſpel may be expected to agree in preaching that doctrine which leads ſinners to ſee their periſhing need of a ſaviour, and which encourages them to *flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope which is ſet before them in the goſpel.*

4. A miniſter of the goſpel muſt be *called*, and *ſolemnly ſeperated to the ſacred work.*

Previous to this, he is to be proved, that his viſible chriſtianity, his aptneſs to teach, and his ſoundneſs in the faith may be known to them who are concerned in his call. But to compleat his character, he muſt be called by, not impoſed upon a people; and ſolemnly ſeperated to the work, *by faſting and prayer, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery*[e].

They who are thus qualified, called, and ordained, are to be regarded as miniſters of the goſpel.

The

[d] John 3. 6. Acts 4. 12. [e] Acts 2. 3. 1 Tim. 4. 14.

The Lord himſelf and not man thus qualifies his miniſters for their work. *By his grace*, ſays the apoſtle Paul, *I am what I am*[f]. The gifts of nature, providence, and grace, are all of them his gifts.

Moreover, by his gracious providence, he leads his people into the way of means to obtain the gift of a good miniſter; and of his love and grace he gives ſuch gifts to his churches.

But he who giveth theſe gifts to his churches *will be enquired of by them to do it for them.* Therefore let us conſider,

Secondly, That God's people are *to wait on him* in all the ways which he preſcribes to them, particularly *by prayer*, for the good gifts of goſpel-miniſters.

I truſt that through your prayers, I ſhall be given unto you, ſays the apoſtle, in my text. It is obſervable, throughout the ſacred ſcripture, that though God's promiſes are free—*Are yea, and Amen in Chriſt Jeſus, to his own glory and praiſe*, yet, he will have his people to ſeek to him—Wait on him in all the ways of his inſtitution, for the promiſed mercy. Thus, when he promiſes, firſt *to give the new heart*, and then, to add temporal ſalvation; to do this *not for his people's worthineſs, but for his own name's ſake*, he ſaith, *I will yet for this be enquired of by the houſe of Iſrael to do it for them.*[g] So God has promiſed *to give* his people *paſtors according to his heart*, yet our Saviour ſays —*Pray ye the Lord of the harveſt, that he will ſend forth laborers into his harveſt.* And does not reaſon itſelf dictate thus much? For, are goſpel-

miniſters

miniſters God's gifts? Does he give gifts and grace to them, to qualify them for the work? Is it by his providence, that *this* miniſter is placed in this church, and *that* miniſter in that church? Then God's people who are in want of ſuch a gift, are to acknowledge their dependence upon him for it; and to wait on him, particularly, by prayer, for this gift to be beſtowed on them. *This*, I underſtand to be a part of our errand to the throne of grace to-day: And your ſanctifying this faſt, under your preſent circumſtances, is agreeable to the revealed will of God. But chriſtians muſt not content themſelves with aſking once, in the moſt ſolemn manner. They muſt ſeek 'till they find—'till God gives them the needed gift:—— Seek it, in their families, and in their cloſets, as well as in public with the congregation of God's people.

Yea, when they have obtained the gift of a good miniſter, they ſhould pray God to be with him, and to grant him grace ſufficient for him. Their miniſter will be *that* to them which the Lord maketh him to be.——But let us not think to be heard merely for our much ſpeaking. And we muſt watchfully avoid every thing that would hinder our prayers.

There are ſeveral things neceſſary to acceptable prayer. As,

1. It muſt be *the prayer of the upright*. If any one *draws near to God with his mouth, and honors him with his lips, while his heart is far from him*, he mocks God, and does not really wait on him for a bleſſing.

Such worſhip is *an abomination to the Lord*, and is not the prayer that he will *have reſpect to*, and graciouſly anſwer.

They who would *aſk and receive*, muſt come to God penitently, come in uprightneſs, and aſk needed mercy—mercy which they feel their need of, and in their prayers pour out the deſire of their ſouls to God.

2. The prayer which God accepts, and will give a gracious anſwer to, muſt be *the prayer of faith. Without faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe God; for he that cometh to him, muſt believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him*[h].

When therefore we come to God for any of his good gifts, we ſhould come, believing that he has the gift to beſtow—believing his power and grace, and make our prayer to him, and truſt in him for an anſwer of peace,—*not for our worthineſs, but for his name's ſake*, for the ſake of Jeſus Chriſt the mediator.

3. It ſhould be *fervent prayer*. 'Tis *the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man* that *availeth much*[i]. And if people are ſenſible of their need of the mercy which they aſk of God——ſenſible for inſtance, of their need of a good miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt,—if they duly prize the gift, and realize that it is a gift of God which they can't hope to obtain, but of his grace; this will lead them to aſk humbly—to cry mightily to him for it. And to encourage ſuch prayer, God has ſaid—he will *regard the prayer of the deſtitute, and will not deſpiſe their prayer*[k].

But

[h] Heb. 11. 6. [i] James 5. 16. [k] Pſal. 102. 17

But there is *ſomething elſe* to be done by a people, beſide their praying to God, to give them a good miniſter of the goſpel, as they would hope to obtain this gift:

Something they muſt turn from and avoid, as they would not hinder their prayers.

1. More generally, they muſt ſee to this—— that they *turn from their ſins unto God, in truth and with all their hearts. If I regard iniquity in my heart* (ſays David) *the Lord will not hear me*[l]. 'Tis an awful conſideration to be propoſed to ſinners: that tho' they come before God with his people,—come, in the moſt ſolemn way of faſting and prayer, and come to aſk the moſt needed mercy; yet, as they come and go away enemies of God, their prayer is not accepted.

Were this to be ſuppoſed the caſe with this congregation to day, this would then be *a day of provocation*, inſtead of a day of truly waiting on God. It is not to be ſuppoſed of the congregation; however there may be reaſon to fear that it is true of ſome that preſent themſelves here before the Lord, with his people.

2. A people that would, by prayer to God, obtain the gift of a good miniſter of the word, muſt particularly *beware of carnal ends* in ſeeking a man to be ſet over them. To ſome it is ſaid—*Ye aſk and receive not, becauſe ye aſk amiſs, that ye may conſume it upon your luſts*[m]. This is applicable to ſuch, if any ſuch there be, as aſk of God the gift of a miniſter to ſtrengthen *their* party, againſt another part of their fellow chriſtians: 'tis applicable to ſuch as deſire a miniſter—to promote

[l] Pſalm 66. 18. [m] James 4. 3.

their worldly glory—to be a credit to them as a polite and ingenious gentleman; while they care not whether he preaches the goſpel to them in its purity or not. They who would truly wait on God for the rich gift of goſpel-miniſter muſt beware of ſuch, and of all falſe ends, and muſt deſire ſueh a miniſter as the goſpel deſcribes; and deſire from the heart the benefit that ſuch miniſters are given to be inſtruments of to the people.

Thus, chriſtians who are ſeeking to God for a miniſter of the goſpel, are to look that there be no ſin in them, to ſeperate between their God and them, and to keep the good gift from them; they ſhould particularly beware of baſe ſiniſter ends in ſeeking a miniſter.

And their duty is not all of it *negative*. There is ſomething which they muſt be *active in*. As,

1. They *ſhould unitedly riſe up to wait on God for ſo rich a gift*. Miniſters of the goſpel are miniſters *to the whole flocks over which the holy ghoſt makes them overſeers*[a]. All the people want a good miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt. And when they are *as ſheep without a ſhepherd*, they ſhould, with one mind and heart, riſe up to ſeek by prayer and all ways ſuitable to the end, a paſtor after God's heart, and ſtrengthen the hands of each other in this good work. He that will then *cauſe diviſions*, and put blocks in the way, to hinder the ſociety's obtaining a good goſpel-miniſter, is unworthy to be numbred with the church or ſociety which he claims the privilege of being a member of.—Only here obſerve, that *two cannot walk together except they be agreed*:

And

[a] Acts 20. 28.

And ſo, it can't be expected that a ſociety will agree in the choice of a miniſter, if they are not agreed in the doctrines—in the religion of the goſpel. This is therefore what may be properly enquired into—whether they are *of one mind* with reſpect to religion itſelf, and the character of the man whom they would have to preach to them the religion of the goſpel. And if they can't agree in this, they had better *part aſunder*, than pretend to unite in that, in which they are ſo diſunited°.

2. A people that want, and are united in their deſire of a goſpel-miniſter, are *to look out for, to ſeek ſuch a giſt of God.* Being deſtitute, it is their buſineſs to ſeek a ſupply. If they have knowledge of candidates who have the appearance of ſuitable ones for them, they may proceed to the trial of one or more of them; without enquiring of others. If they don't know any ſuch candidates, it is fit they ſhould enquire after them,

° This is not deſigned to encourage—to give the leaſt countenance to, the ſeperations which are now ſo common in this land. The author knows too much of the weakneſs and wickedneſs of ſome of them, to mean any ſuch thing.

Neither is it meant to ſuppoſe, that there is occaſion for ſuch a diſunion in this church, or to encourage it. But rather it was tho't, that the mention of the thing would be ſo alarming, as to perſuade the chriſtians here, to watch againſt ſtrifes and diviſions :—to give up every thing but their conſciences —every thing but the truth and cauſe of the Lord, for the ſake of peace and unity.

Yet when truth—neceſſary truth—proper means of converſion and edification, are what is contended for, this is too tender a caſe to be determined by a majority of votes, ſo as to bind the whole ſociety. And he who is acquainted with the controverſies that have been, and that do now ſubſiſt in ſome churches; will, perhaps, think the Sermon unexceptionable in this point, where a ſociety is capable of exiſting as two diſtinct ſocieties.

them, minding well, of whom they enquire, and what information they get. And when they invite the man to preach to them as a probationer, they ſhould *make a proper trial of him* :—Not take any man upon truſt, as we ſay, not lay hands ſuddenly upon any man ; but be ſatisfied with reſpect to his qualifications for the miniſtry, before they call him to take the overſight of them, and ſubmit themſelves to him as their paſtor. When they have thus proved him and are ſatisfied, 'tis their part, to *call him to office*, and to encourage his acceptance of their call, and thereupon *to ſee that he be ſeperated to the ſervice of the goſpel* among them, according to divine inſtitution.

I ſhall here only add—That having thus obtained of the Lord, the rich gift of a miniſter of the goſpel, they are ſtill to pray to God for him, are to *ſtrengthen his hands and encourage his heart* in his work, all that they can : And it infinitely concerns them *to receive the word of God* which he miniſters to them *into good and honeſt hearts, to be doers of it.*

What I have now further to do, is to *apply* what you have heard.

I ſhall do this, in an *addreſs* to the church of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and the congregation of his people, who uſually worſhip God in this houſe ; who are now a bereaved flock, in want of a miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt, to break the bread of life unto them.

Brethren, your conduct in ſanctifying this day as a faſt, under your circumſtance, is to be approved (as I have hinted before). The death of

a miniſter of the goſpel admoniſhes a people of the occaſion they have to humble themſelves before God :—On this account, among others, becauſe they have been no more thankful for, and fruitful under the means of grace which God has given them to enjoy. You have occaſion, under this bereavement, to remember mercy, as well as judgment. Your late paſtor[p], whom God gave to you, at your incorporation into a religious ſociety, was continued to you, and aſſiſted in the ſacred work, a great while—more than forty years. A long life for a miniſter! And yet his age was not ſo great, but, if the will of God had been ſo, he might have ſerved you in the work of the miniſtry, for years to come. This ſhould lead you to enquire—wherefore God ſo contendeth with you ; and to look—that ſuch a diſpenſation of God's holy providence be not loſt upon you.

And now, being as ſheep without a ſhepherd, God is calling you to a work, *new* to moſt of you—A work of no little importance to you, to your children, and to the intereſt of religion among you : I mean, the calling and ſetling another goſpel-miniſter. For, bleſſed be God! tho' you are bereaved, the goſpel is not taken away from you. And there is hope that you may obtain another good miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt, to feed you and your children with the food of the word.

Paſtors and teachers are gifts which the Lord beſtows on his churches. And by his providence this land has yet ſome candidates of whom there is

[p] The Rev. Mr. *John Lowell*, who departed this Life *May* 15th, in the 64th Year of his Age.

is hope that they will ſerve churches in the work of the miniſtry ſkilfully and faithfully. Such an one you want; and ſuch it is your wiſdom and duty to ſeek. And what you have now heard, may ſuggeſt to you ſome rules of procedure in this weighty matter.

It leads you to be *humble*, as thoſe who need the gift, and are dependent on the ſovereign pleaſure—on the grace of God for it.

Some people, when they go about this work, may be ſuppoſed to be too ſelf-confident: They ſeem to think they can have, almoſt, whom they will.—You have as much reaſon to think ſo, as moſt congregations have. And, without doubt you may obtain almoſt any one of thoſe preachers who take the office for *filthy lucre*—who care more for their own living in the world, than they do for Chriſt's ſheep. But you will do well to conſider—that you are as dependent on the Lord for a *good* miniſter, as the leaſt and pooreſt congregations are.

Let this thought then ſink down into your hearts—That the goſpel-miniſter which you want, is the Lord's gift—his free gift which you have no worthineſs of—can't claim it of debt, nor buy it at a price.

Yet know,—You may know it from what you have now heard, that this very gift is what the great head of the church delights to give to his churches.

Therefore, pray to him for it. It is *through your prayers*—in anſwer to prayer, that you are to look and hope for this rich gift. Betake yourſelves then to the Lord, as your refuge in your preſent want.

And that you may aſk and receive, O look to this—that there be no ſin to ſeperate between God and you, and to keep the good gift from you. And in order to ſincerity and fervency in your prayer to God for a good miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt, think of *your need* of ſuch a gift:—How you want to be inſtructed and quickened, and comforted in the way to heaven—want the food of the word, a portion of it in due ſeaſon, in every caſe and condition—Think how dangerous it will be to you, to have a blind guide, a worldly-minded ſhepherd. And further conſider, that after all that you can do yourſelves, you may fail of a paſtor after God's heart. And let ſuch conſiderations perſuade you to cry mightily to the Lord to undertake for you, to guide and ſucceed you in this affair.

You are alſo to behold with a believing eye *the free and rich Grace of God* in providing a way of ſalvation for loſt man, and in ſending his meſſengers to ſhew unto us the way of ſalvation, his expreſs promiſe to give to his church paſtors according to his heart. And hence let your prayer be the prayer of faith; hope in the mercy, the grace, and in the faithfulneſs of God, for the good gift of a goſpel-miniſter. You may *all of you—all that fear God*, contribute, *this way*, towards the obtaining of a good miniſter: The *women*, who may not ſpeak in the church, may yet, in their cloſets, ſpeak to the Lord in prayer, begging of him, to ſet a man over this congregation, who ſhall break the bread of life unto them: The *youth* alſo, if there be any young ones in this place that love the Lord Jeſus Chriſt,

may go to him and plead with him, how they want a ſpiritual guide, and beg of him, to give them one that ſhall be ſkilful and faithful.

God will not ſhut his ears againſt the prayer of them who call on him in truth. It will be a token for good to you, if you have a ſpirit of prayer poured upon you—if you are found wreſtling with the Lord for a bleſſing.

And, O that you may be united in proper means to obtain the gift of a miniſter of the goſpel! Behold how good and how pleaſant this unity will be! And why ſhould not all who have any ſerious thoughts of the chriſtian religion be united in ſeeking the ſame goſpel-miniſter? Will not all of them deſire to have the goſpel preached to them in its purity and ſimplicity? Will they not all deſire a man to be ſet over them, who loves the Lord Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity? Unite then, my brethren, in ſeeking a good miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt, and let not any party-zeal, any baſe end hinder your union.

You will not any of you be ſatisfied with a man for your miniſter, *merely* becauſe he is a man of learning, an eloquent orator, a polite gentleman, and of a good family: For however deſireable it may be to you, to have a man of all theſe qualities, yet, you know that they are not enough to make up the character of a miniſter of the goſpel. You will therefore look that the man be alſo *ſound in the faith.*—By ſoundneſs in the faith, I mean goſpel-doctrine—*the truth as it is in Jeſus.* And I may add—agreeableneſs in the main, with the confeſſions of the faith of proteſtant churches—thoſe of them which are generally known among

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us. For that theſe confeſſions are, *mainly*, and with ſome exceptions, forms of ſound words, agreeing with the ſacred ſcriptures, the moſt pious and learned divines of many ages have ſufficiently proved: And you will have reaſon to refuſe a candidate that laughs at them[q].

[q] The occaſion of ſuch a teſtimony and warning is *this*—Our age produces a generation of men who like not the faith on which the proteſtant church was founded, and has ſtood hitherto. Some of them are men of powers, and draw away diſciples after them.

But they have not been able yet, to obtain a general rejection of the religion of our *fathers*, and the ſetting up of their own ſcheme, in the room of it, in theſe churches. Yea, but few of them dare openly and directly to attempt it: But they are labouring for it *artfully* ſeveral ways.

One way is—by teſtifying againſt creeds, confeſſions of faith, and every thing of that ſort:—pleading that they are ſet up in competition with, and as of, even more value than, the inſpired ſcriptures. Whereas, they know that the church meaneth not ſo.—It is the doctrines confeſſed, and not merely the uſing of confeſſions, that their aim is againſt. There is this evidence of it—— they ſome years ago ſent abroad the aſſembly's catechiſm, which is in uſe among us, ſheared and patched to make it agreeable to Dr. *Taylor*'s ſcheme, with a preface recommending the uſe of catechiſms, only adding that they muſt be according to truth; for which reaſon they had made the alteration. This catechiſm, like a wandring ſtar, ſtrangely appeared among us, and as ſtrangely withdrew itſelf out of our ſight.

Another of their artifices to get rid of the doctrines which the church has long tho't to be doctrines of the goſpel—neceſſary articles of faith is—to repreſent them as matters of controverſy, and ſo, of indifference in religion. And if they can find, in theſe confeſſions, or in any of the writings of the orthodox, an error or ſlip, they harp upon that ſtring, as if they had gotten that which invalidates the whole.

Another device yet, which ſome of them have againſt the faith of theſe churches is—to throw out, at every opportunity, their flouts at our confeſſions of faith, and at the men who are zealous for orthodoxy: as if they meant to banter chriſtians out of their religion. By theſe things they deceive unſtable ſouls. And if we are always ſilent, they will grow bolder ſtill.

But the ſcripture is the teſt to try all doctrines by—To the law and to the teſtimony: *If they ſpeak not according to this word, it is becauſe there is no light in them*[r]. Yet, you will not think it enough that a man ſays—he makes the ſcripture his rule; you will judge whether he preaches *the truth of ſcripture*—whether he *ſpeaks as the oracles of God*[s].

'Tis your buſineſs to prove the man whom you may have your eye upon for a paſtor. You have the liberty and privileges of a congregational-church, a free ſociety; and are not to be dictated in the choice of a miniſter, by any man, or any ſociety of men. I mention *this*, to plead from it, that it is your duty, as it is alſo your intereſt, to make proper trial of a candidate—a probationer for the ſacred office among you: As you would be faithful to Chriſt, and ſettle one of *his* miniſters among you, you muſt do it. Who ſhould do it for you? Whom can you expect to be ſo officious as to go out of his ſphere, and of his own accord make trial of your probationer? And as to a council that you may call to ordain the man, they will ſcarce have time to do it, as it ſhould be done, on the day of ordination. The trial is therefore to be made by you. And in it, you ſhould be faithful to the Lord, and conſult the good of your ſelves, of each other, and of poſterity.——In this trial, attend carefully to his *preaching*. He who *knows the truth*, and *receives*

[r] That man is to be honored, who appears to have a ſpirit of piety himſelf, and to aim at the promotion of it in others, tho' his creed differs from eſtabliſhed forms. But in ſome caſes, the church needs warning—to be on their guard.

coives it in the love of it, will preach it of his own accord. And no declaration of aſſent to the doctrines of the goſpel---no confeſſions of faith, is to be accepted of that man whoſe preaching don't witneſs for him.

You are to obſerve, not only the matter, but the manner of his preaching---whether the apparent aim and tendency of it is, to teach and perſuade men to live godly in Chriſt Jeſus---whether it is a proper means to promote experimental and practical religion. The plaineſt preaching that ſerves to this end, is better than the fineſt ſpeculations and reaſonings where this is wanting.

I ſhall only add, Obſerve the man's converſation, and ſee if it is *as becometh the goſpel*, ſuch as *miniſters grace to the hearer*[w]: for you will want a miniſter out of the pulpit, as well as in it.

I might have gone on to ſay—That a people who are ſeeking a goſpel-miniſter, ſhould *prepare him a lodging*, as the apoſtle ſpeaks in the verſe of my text.---Make ſuitable proviſion for his ſupport. *This* reaſon ſpeaks for, and it is required of chriſtians in the goſpel.——But, conſidering your numbers and wealth---eſpecially conſidering your liberal diſtribution to your late paſtor, and your generous grant to his widow[x], there will be no need to point out your duty in this reſpect.

And now brethren, Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, continue inſtant in prayer, avoid every thing which hinders prayer, neglect nothing which the Lord requires as your part and duty, and be always ready to receive the engrafted word,

[w] Eph. 4. 29. Col. 4. 6.
[x] 100 Dollars yearly.

word, to be doers of it. Then you may hope in the Lord, that of his grace, he will accept your humiliation and prayer, and in his time give you a paſtor according to his heart, whom he will make a rich bleſſing to you and to your children after you.

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